

Christian Life

Some Neglected Truths

A paper read before the recent Prophetic Conference held in the Clarendon Street Baptist church, Boston, by W. W. Niles

Were I to go over the round of "neglected truths" I fear that the enumeration would take in a large number which are vital. "*I prefer to believe*," dropped somewhat hastily, perhaps from the lips of a great preacher of the last generation. It expresses but too accurately the mental attitude of thousands who call themselves Christians, and who have forgotten the elemental fact that we have nothing to do with *preferring* to believe—that our business is to find out, as well as we can, *what is true*, and to believe that. To *believe* the things that *please* us, is but one step short of *doing* the things that *please* us. Could we have once more the old-time sense of our personal responsibility to use every available means for finding out what we ought to believe, and for doing what we ought to do, even then perplexities would remain, and difficulties, but they would not be half so serious as now they are.

The first of the great things sadly neglected of which I am moved to speak is the second coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

With the order of events associated with the Second Advent I am not at this time especially concerned. But that our Lord Jesus Christ shall, in the fulness of time, come forth personally and visibly, in the clouds of heaven, in a coming as literal and as visible as was his going away, is the clear teaching of Holy Scripture, and is an article of the Christian Faith. He shall come to raise the dead, to judge the world, to renew the face of the earth, to establish his dominion over all, to bring in everlasting righteousness. He will come to take his people unto himself, to bestow his gracious awards, and to bring all the faithful to sit down with him at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. To them that have loved him he will give to behold his face forevermore.

This is a truth that stands out everywhere in the New Testament. Our Lord's human nature will never be put off. His heart will never beat less strongly than of old it did, with a brother's love and a brother's sympathy. But his divine effulgence will shine forth, and they that have loved him will see his glory. He will assemble the holy and the humble, and reunite those who have loved on earth. Then he will make the church to put off the garments of mourning, and will array her in beauteous apparel. Then all social problems which press sore yet seem impossible of solution now, will have been solved. Then all woes which afflict mankind will be at an end. Our loving Master himself first sketches the picture. Almost every page of his inspired apostles is aglow with the filling out of the sketch.

Not as a *fact* only does the Second Advent stand on those pages, but as the motive to repentance and a good and godly life. If an apostle in one place exhorts to obedience, to watchfulness in another, to

patience, self-denial, liberality, charity, zeal, purity, unworldliness, sobriety, it is because the "coming of the Lord draweth nigh." The event is inconceivably momentous, therefore the mind must never lose sight of it. The Christian minister must see to it that his people never do lose the sight. "To them that look for him" and live as if they looked for him, "shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation." St. Paul would have Titus, while busied with setting "in order the things that are wanting" in Crete, and ordaining "elders in every city" to cheer his heart with "looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing." St. Peter bids all Christians to be "looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God"—"*hastening* the coming," as it is more expressively in the margin of our Bibles. The Revised Version has it "*earnestly desiring* the coming."

We ought indeed to be instant in prayer, in zeal, in liberality of giving, and in wise planning, for missions, for hospitals, for every work of grace here and now; and to rejoice over every sinner converted, every sore burden lightened from the heart of any. What would better spur one to earnestness in all missionary things than the love of Christ, and love of his appearing, than to live always in the consciousness and in the light of that great day? The coming of the Lord is the hope of the church, and St. Paul, when he would designate the faithful for whom a crown of righteousness is laid up, simply says, "all them also that love his appearing."

If I a Christian minister, do not make my words concerning the Lord's appearing to ring out with no uncertain sound, how great the wrong that I do to him that hath sent me! How dreadful the hurt to his flock committed unto me and to my own unfaithful soul!

It is the one voice of history that in her first and purest ages "the church stood with one foot in eternity, looking for the return of the heavenly Bridegroom." How sad and sorrowful that other picture of this same church, many centuries later, rearing costly thank offerings when the dreaded year one thousand passed by and the Lord did not appear! The bride giving thanks for the absence of her Bridegroom!

The case is not so bad as that now. Moreover every man, conscious of his own sinfulness, can understand Simon Peter's feeling when, in presence of a wondrous display of the Master's divine power, he exclaimed: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Better to feel as Peter felt, no doubt, than proudly to fancy one's self an especial favorite of heaven. Yet if we love him we must, I should think, love to see him.

In the restored Abbey church of St. Albans, in England, I once heard the out-poured voice of one thousand men and youths—the picked singers of all the best

choirs in that country—singing Frances Havergal's glorious hymn—

"Thou art coming, O my Saviour,
Thou art coming, O my King,
In thy beauty all resplendent,
In thy glory all transcendent,
Well may we rejoice and sing."

When the vast choir, strengthened by many voices from the thousands gathered in the church, sent up the final verse:—

"Oh, the joy to see thee reigning,
Thee, our own beloved Lord!
Every tongue thy name confessing,
Worship, honor, glory, blessing,
Brought to thee with one accord.
Thee, our Master and our friend,
Vindicated and enthroned,
Unto earth's remotest end
Glorified, adored and owned!"

Was there in the assemblage one Christian's heart so cold as not to thrill with joyous love at thought of that day of our Redeemer's manifested triumph? I hope there was none. How could there be any?

Yet alas! in the absence of definite teaching in things of religion in these last days, if you judge from sermons printed, and from reports of sermons, and from what you hear in the conversation of many Christian teachers, are you not driven to see that our Lord's second coming, as to be greatly desired, is about the last thing to be preached, spoken of, or thought of. How can these things be? A devout member of a communion of "Evangelical" Christians, then of seventy years, was once staying in my family in the season of Advent, and was at church. The sermon was very naturally upon "Blessedness of Hope" of our Lord's visible return, and the duty of always looking for it. She had lived all her life under the pastoral care of very eminent and worthy men. Yet her comment was, "Only once before this in all my life have I heard our Lord's coming preached as a thing to be looked for."

It may be alleged, by them who think seldom of these last great things, that Christ is now absent *only from sight*—that according to his most true promise he is now with, and in, the church. Undoubtedly we have not an absent Christ and a present spirit as his substitute, but a present Spirit by his marvellous working to make Christ to be all the more present. "He shall take of mine and shall show it unto you." "Christ is the Text, the Spirit preaches the sermon," Doctor Pusey has justly remarked. Christ, God Incarnate, is "the life of men," the Holy Ghost is the *Giver* of that "life." And this is not only the Dispensation of the Spirit; it is the Christian Dispensation as well. And, thank God, the Lord Christ is even now verily with his church. True is this, and gracious and good not less than true.

But this is not all. "When he shall appear we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." I hope we will not grieve our Saviour's heart by suffering his final Epiphany to remain a neglected truth.

Another much neglected truth, neglected both by preachers and by sinners, is the